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SUBJECT: ANBAR CANDIDATES CONFIDENT FOR PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: Classified by A/DCM Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a series of recent discussions in the week before Provincial Council (PC) elections, Anbari candidates and the Governorate Elections Officer (GEO) expressed enthusiasm and confidence that the elections will be a strong step forward for Anbar. Candidates predicted the number of seats their parties would win, and uniformly criticized the large number of political entities running. The GEO was confident that final preparations for the elections were in order. One party noted that Anbari Imams had encouraged Muslims to vote wisely. This same party thought that the results of the provincial elections would influence Iraq's National Parliamentary elections. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Poloff met separately with Anbar GEO Khalid Rajab and several candidates running in the Anbar provincial elections in Ramadi and Baghdad January 18, and January 24-26. Sheikh Hamid Al Heiss (Al Anbar Salvation Council party, Iraqi Tribal Front coalition), traveled to Baghdad to speak with us. Sheikh Daher Hameed Awad Sulayman (Conference of the Awakening of Iraq party (MSI, the "Sahwa"), Anbar coalition), Khamis Abtan (Deputy Anbar PC Chair, representing Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), running with Coalition of Intellectuals and Tribes for Development (CITD), Dr. Jassim Al Halboosi, (National Dialogue Front party, Iraqi National Project Alliance coalition), Mohammed Fatha and Nehal Ahmad Salih (National Movement for Reform and Development party (NMRD), no coalition), Hajji Hamid Al Uwaid (independent candidate) all traveled to Camp Ramadi. Poloffs met Khalid in his office in downtown Ramadi.

13. (U) The candidates and the GEO felt confident about the elections, and all agreed that the election offered an opportunity to advance the reconstruction of Anbar and Iraq as a whole. Despite concerns about some irregularities, all looked forward to the elections as a successful demonstration of Iraq's increasing sovereignty and commitment to democracy. (NOTE: A separate cable details the candidates' concerns about potential election irregularities. END NOTE).

TOO MANY CANDIDATES, UNEDUCATED VOTERS

14. (C) Mohammed Fatha and Nehal Ahmad Salih (NMRD) thought that the Anbar elections were complicated by too many political entities (39) and candidates (543). Sheikh Daher (MSI) echoed this sentiment, and noted that Anbaris do not have the sophistication to select the best qualified candidates. Mohammed Fatha, Sheikh Hadi, Hajji Al Uwaid, and Sheikh Hamid (Al Anbar Salvation) expected many to vote for tribal candidates based on tribal affiliation.

PREDICTIONS

15. (C) Khamis Abtan (IIP), Dr. Jassim (Dialogue), and Sheikh Daher (MSI) all claimed that their parties would win "a

majority" of seats in the new 29 seat council. Sheikh Hamid (Al Anbar Salvation) looked forward to winning six to seven seats.

¶6. (C) Mohammed Fatha and Nehal Ahmad Salih (NMRD) expected the party would win three to four seats. Mohammed predicted his party would have the fourth largest representation in the new PC, behind MSI, IIP, and the Dialogue parties. They both felt increasingly confident in their prospects for the elections, as they claimed that representatives of the CITD/IIP and the United National Movement lists had separately approached Mohammed January 21-22 to create a new alliance. NMRD declined to pursue these alliances.

¶7. (C) Hajji Hamid al-Uwaid is running as an individual candidate, without any party or coalition affiliation. He was not confident that he would win a seat in the council, but claimed to have 7,000-8,000 strong votes. He stated that he ran independently of other parties, giving up the opportunity for greater financial and campaign support, since he was afraid that his core supporters (primarily young people, he maintains) would abandon him. According to al-Uwaid, Anbaris think the parties are only out for their own interests. His comments throughout the discussion were vague and coarse, suggesting that his campaign is rather unsophisticated.

CLERICS

¶8. (SBU) Mohammed (NMRD) reported that Imams and several

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mosques had encouraged Anbaris not only to vote in the provincial elections, but to consider it "a duty to vote for the genuinely good candidates." He had no indication that Imams were endorsing specific candidates, but did hear that in a remote northern village of Anbar (unnamed) an Imam had told his faithful not to vote for NMRD.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

¶9. (C) Mohammed (NMRD) thought that the situation of the current national Iraqi Council of Representatives is a tragedy. According to Nehal, radical religious parties had reduced Iraq to its current weakness. Both thought that PC elections will mark a reconfiguration in the entire political map for all of Iraq. They declared that the current parties on the national scene would disappear, to be replaced by new parties (such as NMRD) with Iraq's best interests at heart.

GEO PREPARATIONS

¶10. (C) Anbar GEO Khalid reported that final preparations for the elections were close to being finalized, from delivery of ballots to preparations for limited sanctioned vehicle movement on election day for internally displaced persons and the elderly and infirm. He looked forward to successful voting on January 28 for special needs voters (Iraqi Army and police, hospitalized voters, and prisoners), and general voting on January 31.

CROCKER